

Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory committee  
Meeting Summary - June 15, 2011 –**Approved**

**Members Present:** Greg Baker, Melissa Brown, Jonathan Fink, Manny Hidalgo, Larysa Kurylas, Leslie McDermott, Tom Martin, James Mensah, Susan Petersen, and Erin Roberts

**Members Absent:** Ciliny Alce, Maureen Carrington, Eleanor Duckett, Regina Dull, Chelsea Johnson, Sara Lappano, Zoe Lefkowitz, Chris Lindsay, Diane Lynne, Patrick Naehu, Dave Taghipour

**Guests:** David Dise, Director of Montgomery County Dept. of General Services; Steve Silverman, Director of Montgomery County Dept. of Economic Development; Sandra Tallant and Luis Estrada of Montgomery County Planning Dept.; Taylor Brown of Wheaton Patch; and Sanita DeBose of BrandUworld

**Staff Present:** Rob Klein and Pete McGinnity of Montgomery County Dept. of General Services, Office of Planning & Development

**Call to Order/Opening Remarks:** Mr. Baker, the Chair called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

**WRAC Meeting Summary for May and April** – As a quorum was not present, the Summaries of the May 18, 2011 and April 20, 2011 WRAC meeting were not adopted.

**Redevelopment Report** - Rob Klein discussed the following:

- BF Saul Co. - Plan views and 3-Dimensional angles of B.F. Saul's proposed Concept Plan are posted on both the County's and BF Saul's 'Wheaton's New Downtown' websites.
- The County and WMATA are currently analyzing B.F. Saul's proforma statements on their proposed Concept Plan.
- Ennalls Ave.-Price Ave. Connection – The County retained Loiderman Soltesz & Associates to perform preliminary engineering studies to determine the feasibility of this connection. The connection is proposed in the new Draft Wheaton Sector Plan
- Zoning Text Amendment 11-1- was introduced to the County Council on 6/14/2011. The amendment modifies the current CR zone. Council Work sessions are scheduled for 6/22, 6/23 & 6/27
- WRAC membership - Candidate interviews are scheduled for 6/22 & 6/23. There are 8 new candidates to be interviewed.

**Library/RecCenter** – David Dise, Director of the Department of General Services discussed the following regarding the project:

- Status update-The project is funded for preliminary engineering in the FY12 CIP. This will inform negotiations with the Parks Department, which owns the Recreation Center property, and help determine whether the County will acquire

the property or arrange a land swap. FY 12 funding will also enable General Services to start working with MC-DOT for right of way abandonment of that portion of Hermitage Ave. that bisects the existing Rec. Center and Library properties. Hermitage Ave. will be rerouted southward to Arcola Avenue. The project will then move to conceptual layout and then to architectural design. The County already has several architects on retainer for its projects and Whitman Requardt & Associates has been considered as the architect for the Wheaton Library/Rec Center.

- Mr. Dise wanted to gain an understanding of WRAC members' interest in an architectural design competition for the Library/Rec Center. The following pros and cons were discussed:
  - Pros - a competition raises the bar on the design of what is probably the most important civic public building in Wheaton
  - Quality design could generate a tremendous amount of civic pride and additional interest in Wheaton's redevelopment.
  - A unique design could make the Library/Rec Center a destination point in the area.
  - Cons - The extended period of time and expense a competition might add to the project's completion.
  - Having to justify why one design was selected over another.

Additional discussion focused on the design competition that was held in Silver Spring. DGS will review the process employed in Silver Spring - to better understand how long such a process might take - and advise WRAC. Mr. Dise concluded the discussion by stating that whatever process was ultimately used – current architects on retainer, or design competition - the design should be “singularly outstanding”

**Small Business Concerns** – Steve Silverman, Director of the Department of Economic Development (DED) addressed committee concerns related to the approximately 55 small businesses that could be potentially impacted in the immediate area by the proposed B.F. Saul development project. Mr. Silverman discussed the following:

- He wanted to assure the committee that the County Executive recognizes that small businesses are the “backbone of the County's economy” and is “keenly focused” on what's going to happen in Wheaton.
- DED has re-oriented its approach to small businesses. The focus has shifted to helping small businesses grow through contracts with the County. Previous emphasis on start-up businesses and one-to-one counseling is now addressed through numerous resource partners, such as - LEDC, SBDC, Score, and the Rockville Women's Center.
- DED wants to play a major role in interacting with Wheaton's small businesses, particularly with regard to the concerns they have identified regarding redevelopment. All issues identified by these businesses can be considered as “on the table”
- DED's first step will be to meet with both property owners and tenants (businesses) at “Ground Zero” to understand, from those most impacted; what are

their plans over next several years. DED needs to find out what both property owners and business owners expectations are through direct communication with each group. This should happen over course of this summer and fall.

- DED will work with community based groups-WRAC, the Chamber of Commerce, LEDC and other groups to leverage communication with Wheaton's small businesses.
- Redevelopment will have impact – sometimes adverse – on small businesses. One of the County Executive's goals is to make sure we're dealing with small business concerns.
- During Silver Spring's revitalization, DED worked with impacted and displaced businesses, providing forms of financial assistance to aid in providing relocation and marketing assistance. Mr. Silverman recognized that the challenges in Wheaton would be different, as the size of Silver Spring's downtown (360 + acres) afforded greater opportunity for relocation, when needed.
- The County Executive is prepared to put small business assistance as a line item in future budgets, but need to get additional info as to what is needed to determine financial scope of effort.

#### **Design Guidelines – Luis Estrada/Sandy Tallant**

- Ms. Tallant advised that the Sector plan is being reviewed by the County Council. A Public Hearing scheduled for 7/19.
- Luis Estrada is the urban designer working on Design Guidelines for the Wheaton Central Business District. He advised that Planning staff are scheduled to present the Draft Guidelines to the Planning Board on 7/14 to get Board input regarding concept and structure before the Guidelines are forwarded to Council.
- While the Guidelines are complimentary to the Sector Plan, the Council does not adopt the Guidelines.
- The Guidelines are in DRAFT form. They will be available on the Planning Department website before presentation to Planning Board on 7/14 to allow opportunity for review and comment to the Board.
- The intent of Guidelines is to frame conversation between developers and planning staff. The Guidelines are a tool for Planning Department staff and are not intended for use in any other context. They are only applicable in discretionary review
- The purpose of guidelines is to:
  - Illustrate the recommendations of the Sector Plan
  - Inform possible applicants of design expectations and possible resources
  - Provide the Planning Staff for a framework for Project review
- The Guidelines are not intended to establish architectural styles. They are just a tool for planning staff when reviewing projects.
- The Guidelines have limits. They are not a substitute for zoning code requirement and are subordinate to regulatory requirements, such as the Road Code.
- The 3 basic goals of Guidelines are:
  - Legibility – what can be done to create an identifiable downtown

- Connectivity – enhance existing grid & existing public use networks
- Sustainability – reducing environmental impacts and improving awareness of what can be done to create sustainable communities
- Each of 3 goals has specific design objectives associated with it.
- There are different goals for new development inside the core, new development outside the core, and existing development
- Issues the Guidelines will address:
  - Compatibility and scale
  - How to enhance the character of existing structures as redevelopment occurs around them
  - Transitions around CBD perimeters. These need to be carefully crafted to manage densities as they taper from the downtown core to outlying residential communities.
  - Improving the public realm – streetscapes; transitioning highways to boulevards; increasing connectivity
  - Focus on the need to create new open spaces – whether temporary or permanent and the basic considerations for each
  - Sustainability for both new and existing structures

**WRAC Input to Council at Public Hearing**– Mr. Martin, Chair of the Planning & Visioning subcommittee introduced the document, “Bullets of Wheaton Sector Plan Letter to the County Council”. The document was meant to frame WRAC’s testimony/comments to the County Council at its 7/19 public hearing on the Wheaton Central Business District & Vicinity Sector Plan. Issues discussed included:

- Public amenities – throughout the Wheaton CBD and particularly in the B.F. Saul Co. project
- Specificity on the connection between Westfield Wheaton and the downtown core
- Environmental considerations – lack of trees and tree coverage

While other issues were raised, Mr. Baker, the Committee Chair, noted that a quorum was lacking. Therefore, any comments to the Council had to be limited to prior commentary on the Sector plan, previously approved by a majority of WRAC. quorum is lacking

The meeting adjourned at 9:11 p.m.